

Farmers and their wellbeing during Irelands COVID-19 crisis

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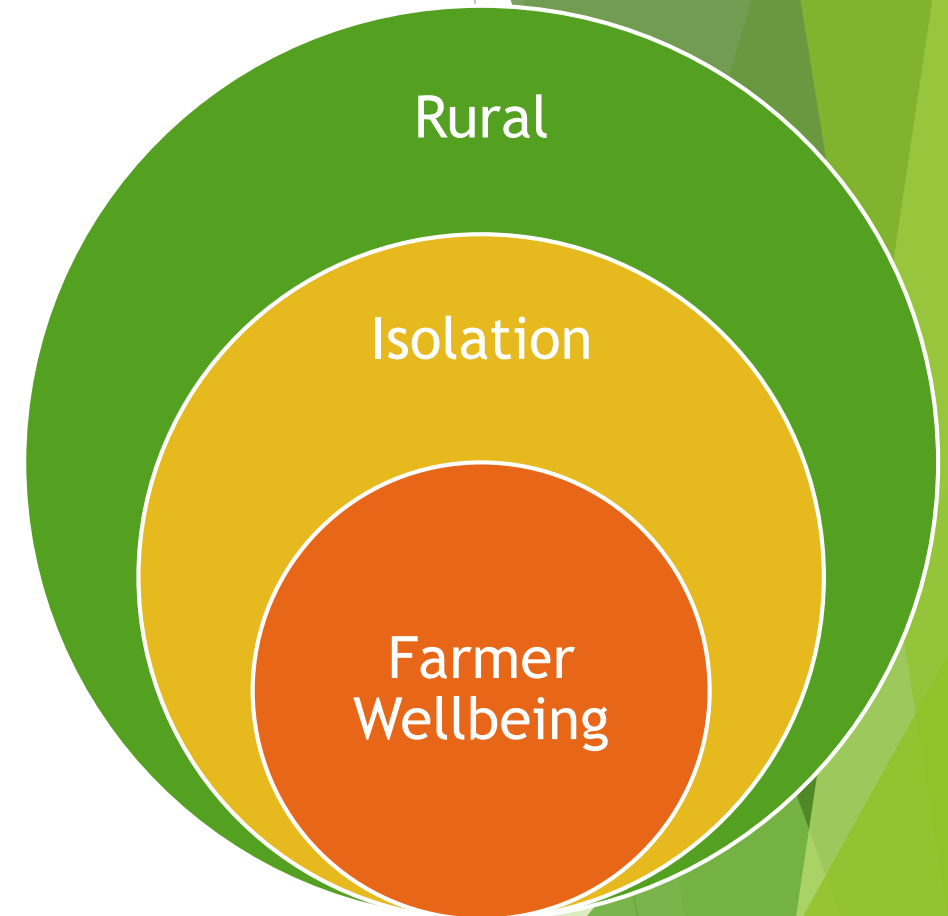
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Context

Interviewing farmers about their experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research is largely qualitative with quantitative work analysing farmers in TILDA dataset. COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on mental health and wellbeing. This has been established in studies in U.K, U.S.A and China. (Ahmed et al. 2020; Groarke et al. 2020; Twenge & Joine., 2020).

- ▶ Rural:
 - ▶ Rural space was viewed by the public as safer / healthier, But restrictions also applied.
 - ▶ Some rural areas experienced very high levels of C19 infections.
 - ▶ Geographically: Border Counties, West of Ireland.
 - ▶ Occupationally: Meat plants
- ▶ Isolation
 - ▶ Rural communities seen to be at risk of physical and social isolation
 - ▶ Small population numbers / Low population densities
 - ▶ Poor infrastructure, including broadband
 - ▶ Limited services
 - ▶ Some rural populations more at risk, e.g. older people / farmers
- ▶ Farmer Wellbeing
- ▶ 16 Interviews, of which 14 farmers 2 medical professionals.
 - ▶ Farmers spend long periods of time working alone and record high levels of occupational stress. (Brennan et al. 2021)
 - ▶ Research has been conducted into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on essential, including medical workers. **Little** research to date has been conducted on the **specific** impact of COVID-19 on farmers.



Discussion of Findings

Continuity in farm work positive for wellbeing.

Farmers adapted to technological solutions for occupational and social needs.

Greater pressures on social connections in rural community's.

Further research needed to focus on older farmers living alone.

COVID-19 brought change value system, priorities, time to reflect.

Implications / Recommendations

- ▶ Farmers have been resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic. Informal networks important for uptake of new technology.
- ▶ Farming held in greater esteem because of pandemic. More secure and less economic disruption compared to other sectors. This may be a feature of future crisis that put pressure on food supplies.
- ▶ People interviewed have expressed concern for more isolated farmers being unable to adapt to new technology. There must be greater assistance for farmers who may struggle with greater use of technology.
- ▶ Farmers concerned that greater reliance on technology will place a greater burden of work on them going forward.